



## **The Un-Conference and the Un-Presentation**

### **Background:**

In an effort to support sustainability and further the shift of young writers toward the front of the classroom, we began exploring unconventional learning models. The collaborative, low-key nature of the TeachMeet or Un-conference appealed to us as a structure that could inspire writers and teachers of all ages to share their expertise rather than positioning themselves as passive learners.

### **How We Used the Work Included in this Center:**

Several teachers and administrators have adapted this approach for use in their classrooms and during faculty meetings. The WNY Young Writers' Studio is hosting their first annual Un-conference this spring. The fellows of our program will be facilitating a variety of conversations and sessions relevant to writing instruction, strategy, and process.

### **Think and Ink:**

How could you adapt this format for use in your own classroom?

Please reflect and share on the Think and Ink sheet provided.

# Focus on Representation: The Teach-Meet

As a community, we are beginning to consider this dimension of the CARS framework from a variety of angles. We define ourselves as a community of young writers who teach and teachers who write, and our alignment with this standard is representative of our attention to representation. But representation is about much more than this. It also requires us to consider who may be missing within our community and to question who we are, what we do, and why we do it.

Whose expertise are we lacking? How do we invite their participation? What may be the unintended consequences of doing so? We are eager to become a diverse and vibrant community, but we aren't there yet, and moving forward rapidly could lead to unforeseen and unwanted shifts that alienate us from our vision or even from each other. The Teach-Meet is helping us consider how we might address these needs in positive and purposeful ways.

Teach-Meets are organized and led by "average people with extraordinary ideas" who are eager to celebrate learning by participating in genuine conversation about what they do

(<http://www.teachmeet.org.uk/>). Facilitators of such events provide little more than a framework and a space where small groups of learners can discuss their ideas and strategies informally and typically, in short bursts of time. Teach-Meets are low-prep and preferably, few materials are distributed. Conversation is king and often, it is captured and continues online via the use of social networking tools such as Twitter, Skype, facebook, wikis, or ning. This is described as "back channeling."

## Materials Required:

\_\_\_ A space large enough to house your group

\_\_\_ Multiple tables or rooms, where individual meetings can take place

\_\_\_ A posted framework reflecting:

- The time-table for the day, including when sessions begin and end
- Topics, speakers, and locations of each session, aligned to the time table presented

## Assessing to Learn:

Teach-Meets serve many purposes and allow for a variety of assessment opportunities. Asking writers to identify those they met whose expertise and passions might enrich the work of the community as a whole helped us to begin rethinking how we approach representation. Inviting writers to journal about the effect of

connecting ourselves to those outside of our community provides new perspectives about who we are, how we influence others, and how others can influence us in meaningful ways.

## **Step-by-Step Guide:**

1. Select a date, a time, and a location for your Teach-Meet.
2. Ask writers to identify a strategy, tool, or idea that they could share with others in under fifteen minutes.
3. Create a framework for the day, including a clear time-table.
4. Prepare the space by setting up tables and posting numbered tents on them.
5. Invite community fellows and encourage them to bring their parents, friends, colleagues, students, or family members as well. Invite these people to act as participants in the Teach-Meet.
6. Determine whether or not you will be using a web-based back-channel to capture the day's events.
7. On the day of the event, post the framework and time-table in a central location.
8. Guide participants in registering their session at a specific time and location.
9. Welcome participants.
10. Celebrate learning.

## **Re-Tooling This Approach on the Web**

- Rather than meeting face-to-face, participants can begin connecting with and learning from those outside of your classroom or community online. Social networking tools such as ning enable writers and teachers from all over the globe to share their ideas and their greatest challenges with one another anytime and anywhere. Consider visiting the English Companion Ning, founded by Jim Burke:  
<http://www.englishcompanion.ning.com>
- When writers and teachers establish personal learning networks online they gain access to a community of diverse learners who can inform their practice, enrich their work, and challenge their assumptions. For more information about personal learning networks and how to begin creating your own, visit Sue Waters's wiki, aptly titled *PLN Yourself*, at <http://suewaters.wikispaces.com/>

## Sample TeachMeet/Un-conference Schedule

Hollis Middle School Celebration of Writing  
Saturday, March 13<sup>th</sup>  
9am-10am

As participants file into the room, they place their name and something they would like to share on the time-table. Every fifteen minutes, speakers and listeners shift. Everyone shares at least once, and when they are finished, they can visit other tables and drop in the conversations that they choose.

Table Number	9-9:15am	9:15-9:30am	9:30-9:45am	9:45-10am
1	Lisa H Starting a blog	Kelly L. Editing checklist	Carmen V. Illustrating a Children's Book	Corey L. Markets for kids
2	Manuel R. Peer review	Open Reading Come Share a Piece of Your Own Writing!		
3	Mrs. Owens Creating a hook	Rebecca Z. Quaker Read	Mrs. Barsottelli Writer's Notebooks	Jenna Z. Using four square
4	Jenny S. My favorite graphic organizer for essay writing	Mr. Burns Helping writers improve sentence fluency	Tech Playground  Visit this table to play with new tech tools that help writers do good work	
5	Mr. Fredrick Turnitin.com	Lyle R. Using Easy Bib	Andrew N. Kid-friendly rubrics	Lisa N. Creating writer's voice
6	Carl M.	Mrs. Sanders	Mark V.	Mr. Xavier

	Using foldables	Our multi-genre research paper	Designing a podcast	Joining the school literary magazine staff
7	Sonya L. Brainstorming using Pandora	Morgan D. Grammar games that I like	Peer Review Corner Bring a piece of your writing and participate in peer review	